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AUTHOR Platt, Gail Malone
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ABSTRACT

An overview of the activities and services of South Plains College's Learning Center (LC) is provided in this annual report for 1990-91. Introductory material outlines the scope of the report and offers detailed descriptions of the three major changes to the Learning Center: (1) the implementation of the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP), a state-mandated effort to assess and remediate basic skills deficiencies in reading, writing, and math; (2) the reorganization of the LC which gave primary responsibility for remedial English and Math courses to the English and Math departments; and (3) the assignment of LC staff and faculty to the Dean of Students office rather than the Vice-President of Academic Affairs office. The next section reviews TASP remediation outcomes, concluding that students appear to benefit from early and appropriate placement in remedial settings, but that those who require extensive remediation may be unable to make sufficient progress to enter college-level programs. The next section provides a statistical analysis of the population served by the LC, exploring student demographics, their TASP status and scores, and participation in TASP remediation. Following a section on faculty/staff activities and accomplishments, other activities related to linkages with and services to students and outside organizations are enumerated. Next, a qualitative evaluation, offering verbatim comments from faculty and students, is provided. After listing goals for 1991-92, the report concludes with a discussion of the effectiveness of the implemented changes, an examination of course-based remediation, and an exploration of future plans, focusing on such areas as academic support services, remediation, and funding. A short bibliography and statistical overview are attached. (MPH)

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE: THE 1990-91 LEARNING CENTER ANNUAL REPORT

by

GAIL MALONE PLATT, PH.D.

Director of the Learning Center

South Plains College

Levelland, Texas

July 1991

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ABSTRACT

The 1990-91 Annual Report for the Learning Center, South Plains College, Levelland, Texas, contains a description of changes in the Learning Center since the last Annual Report (1987-88) was published. These changes include (a) the implementation of a statewide program for placement testing, advisement, remediation, and evaluation (the Texas Academic Skills Program), (b) the realignment of remedial English and math within their own departmental boundaries with the responsibility for reading remediation, study skills, and developmental communications residing within the Learning Center's domain, and (c) a change in the Learning Center's reporting mechanism. This report also describes the Learning Center's course-based instructional component, statistics profiling the population served by the Learning Center in 1990-91, the activities of the professionals working in the Learning Center, and miscellaneous activities. A brief evaluation of Learning Center 1990-91 activities and a list of goals for 1991-92 also are given. Finally, the report provides commentary on some of the more significant issues associated with each of these topics. In closing, speculation on trends for the future are offered.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: THE 1990-91 LEARNING CENTER ANNUAL REPORT

The Learning Center is an academic support activity providing reading and study skills course-based instruction, peer-tutoring, computer-aided-instruction, workshops and seminars, and independent-study opportunities to the students at South Plains College, Levelland. This Annual Report provides an update on changes in the Learning Center, a description of its course-based instructional component, statistics on its overall operation, a description of its professionals and their activities, a listing of other activities supported by the Learning Center, a brief evaluation of its operation, and its goals for the future. A summary with commentary also is provided.

Introduction

In 1987, the SPC Learning Center's Annual Report, entitled, "A Commitment to Literacy," provided a comprehensive description and record of the academic support services provided to students at the college. Since 1987, the Learning Center has seen many changes, including (a) the implementation of a state-mandated program of required assessment of basic skills in reading, writing, and math, and required remediation of basic skill deficiencies, (b) the reorganization of the Learning Center with remedial English courses now primarily the responsibility of the English Department and remedial math courses now primarily the responsibility of the Math Department, and (c) the assignment of the Learning Center staff and faculty to the Dean of Students

Office rather than the Vice-President of Academic Affairs Office. The following sections will explain and/or comment briefly on each of these changes.

The Texas Academic Skills Program

In 1989, the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) was implemented through legislative mandate and became effective policy for all public colleges and universities in the state. In essence, the TASP has five components: 1. mandatory assessment of all students entering a Texas public college or university for the first-time in the fall 1989 or thereafter, except those students entering an occupational program requiring fewer than 9 hours of basic education courses; 2. mandatory participation in remediation for all students who fail to pass a portion of the test of reading, writing, or math skills; 3. mandatory advisement/placement for all undergraduates; 4. tracking/monitoring of each cohort class beginning college in September 1989 and following, including TASP Test performance, participation in remediation, and subsequent performance in college-level courses; and 5. evaluation of assessment, remediation, advisement, and tracking procedures.

To date, the effect of TASP on Learning Center programs has been minimal; for example, the number of students identified by TASP as needing reading remediation has been substantially lower than the number identified in the past when the "Nelson-Denny Reading Test" was the placement test used: A report released by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board indicated that of the 1,082 SPC students taking the TASP test in 1990, 63 percent (on both campuses) passed the TASP reading test. On the Levelland campus alone, between 78 and 80 percent of students taking the TASP passed the reading

portion. In contrast, when the "Nelson-Denny Reading Test" was used as the placement test, only 49 percent of the students read at or above the college-level (fall 1988); 17 percent read below the ninth grade-level. In simple terms, the TASP reading test is probably identifying those students at greatest risk of having reading deficiencies (or those reading at ninth or tenth grade-level).

Because fewer students have been identified as needing remediation in reading, even mandatory participation in remediation has not significantly increased the number of students taking reading courses. There are two reasons for this outcome. First, prior to TASP when reading remediation was only recommended (and not required) about 36 percent of those identified as needing remediation enrolled in remedial reading courses; for example, in 1987-88, 218 students enrolled in remedial reading courses. In the first year of TASP implementation (1989-90), only 256 students enrolled in reading remediation. In the past academic year (1990-91), 282 students enrolled in reading remediation (a 10 percent increase over the previous year).

Another reason for the slight impact of TASP on reading enrollment is the institution's policy of requiring that students remediate in only one area at a time if they fail more than one portion of the TASP test. For example, many students who fail more than one portion of TASP will have higher reading scores than math or writing scores. [More SPC students fail the math part--only 54 percent passed in 1990--and writing part--61 percent passed in 1990--of TASP than reading.] In these cases, students are advised (or opt) to enroll in a math or writing course corresponding to their lowest score on TASP.

Moreover, this practice has a logical basis in that students appear to see math and writing as having direct ties to required courses they will need to take whereas reading is a foundation skill, implicit (versus explicit) to the curriculum. In other words, math is viewed by students as a prerequisite to taking college algebra and writing is seen as a prerequisite for college English.

Students also seem to have a better understanding of the importance of math and writing than reading. This may be partly due to the fact that students' past experience with reading programs in high school and junior high were often exercises in word and pattern recognition with little opportunity for critical thinking, logical analysis, and creative reflection. In other words, students often think of reading as nothing more than word recognition and pronunciation. Thus, it is not uncommon for even a very poor reader to argue, "But, I can read." Students' reluctance to take a reading course may also be partly attributed to students' beliefs that reading is not fundamental to academic success.

In a survey administered by the Director of the Learning Center to 111 students voluntarily attending a short seminar on reading improvement in the fall 1990, 58 percent of the students replied that they did not regularly read their course textbooks even though 70 percent indicated that they believed their professors expected them to read the texts. When asked to choose among four options (that reading was very important, important, somewhat important, or not important), only 25 percent of the students said that reading was very important to their college success and only 28 percent said that reading was important. The majority of students (58 percent) responded that they read less than 50 pages per week from texts and only 7 percent read more than 150

pages per week. The survey results appeared to confirm anecdotal reports from former students who have indicated that their biggest adjustment in moving from the community college to the four-year college or university was the increase in reading load.

Shifting English and Math

In the spring 1989, the Director of the Learning Center proposed re-organization pertinent to the implementation of TASP, specifically, that all English courses, both remedial and college-level, be taught in the English Department and that all math courses, both remedial and college-level, be taught in the Math Department. There were several reasons for this proposal.

First, in the past, the Learning Center had been responsible for providing instruction for only a portion of the remediation in English and math; for example, only two to three sections of remedial English were taught by Learning Center faculty and only the basic arithmetic course (Math 033) and the math for vocational nursing students (Math 012) were taught by Learning Center faculty; the proposal was aimed at consolidating all English and math instruction.

Second, because Learning Center faculty were not considered a part of the English and math faculties, they had little access to information or support from the English and math faculties. This means that communication was sometimes amiss or lacking. It was believed that better continuity between the remedial and college-level courses would be achieved if faculty in a department were responsible for both.

Third, faculty routinely assigned to teach only remedial courses often suffer from teacher "burn-out." The problems associated with dealing with

only those students who have serious skill deficiencies (and often learning disabilities) was often brought to the attention of the Learning Center Director. The proposal also aimed at allowing faculty to have the opportunity to teach both remedial and college-level courses pertinent to their academic preparation and training.

Fourth, Learning Center faculty traditionally were not considered faculty, even when they assumed full-time teaching responsibilities and even though they possessed equivalent (or sometimes superior) credentials to faculty in other departments/programs. The proposal also was offered in hopes of securing faculty status for Learning Center faculty and their access to the same benefits accrued to other faculty members of the institution.

The effect of the proposal was its approval and the achievement of its stated goals. Thus, the Learning Center assumed responsibility for the reading and study skills instruction of students, including remedial and college-level reading courses and the College Success Course. In regard to reading, the Learning Center offers a two-hour vocabulary development course (remedial--RDG 026), a three three-hour course sequence in comprehension, vocabulary, and study skills (remedial--RDG 030, 034, 035) with courses offered at three different levels of difficulty, and a three-hour college-level reading course emphasizing analytical reading and critical reasoning skills (RDG 133).

The College Success Course (CSC 031) is a study skills and interpersonal skills development course designed to increase student retention. Materials used are provided by College Survival, Inc. [Becoming a Master Student is the text.]. In 1989, the Academic Council approved that the course be strongly recommended for students on academic probation at the institution. The course

is required for students returning to the institution from academic suspension or upon recommendation by the Admissions Committee.

The need for an additional course was substantiated when it became apparent that several students narrowly missed passing both the reading and writing parts of the TASP test and that some students passed the highest level remedial writing course (ENG 0302) without subsequently passing the TASP writing test; thus, English 038 also is offered by the Learning Center. English 038 is a course combining both reading and writing skills. Since all reading courses adopt a whole-language approach, English 038 is unique only in that it provides students with an opportunity to develop in-depth higher-level, analytical reading and reflective writing skills.

In the summer of 1990, a three three-hour course sequence in developmental communications was developed by the institution, and the Learning Center hired a faculty member with ESL credentials. Therefore, once a need for ESL instruction was established by the faculty and advisors, the Learning Center began offering a section of developmental communications (DC 032) for international students.

Reassignment to Student Services

The reassignment of the Learning Center from the Vice-President of Academic Affairs Office to the Dean of Students Office was not without difficulty. However, the move has been beneficial for the Learning Center in significant ways.

First, the Learning Center has received increased administrative support from the Dean of Students Office. For example, the physical environment has been made more attractive and more conducive for student learning with the

acquisition of new desks and chairs for the computer lab. Posters for the lab areas were also purchased. Maintenance of the physical facilities also has been improved.

Second, there has been an improvement in employee relations in the Student Assistance Center, especially between the staff in the Dean of Students Office and the faculty in the Learning Center. There is an apparent spirit of camaraderie and cooperation, making the workplace more pleasant and efficient.

Although numerous drawbacks to the re-assignment were identified at the time of the decision (and many of these have materialized as predicted), the Learning Center faculty and staff unanimously agree that the benefits have been worthwhile. At this time, the Learning Center does not seek a change to its former position within the organizational framework.

TASP Remediation Outcomes

Since the implementation of TASP, 538 students have enrolled in reading remediation. In the fall 1989, 165 enrolled in remediation; of the 76 participating in the highest level of reading remediation, 58 were successful as evidenced by (a) passing the reading part of the TASP test if TASP-required, or (b) passing the coursework if TASP-exempt. This produced a 76 percent success rate for the reading program.

Only 91 students enrolled in reading remediation in the spring 1990; of the 36 enrolled in the highest level of remediation, 28 were successful. This produced a 78 percent success rate.

In the fall 1990, 169 students enrolled in reading remediation; 64 participated in the highest level of remediation (RDG 035 or RDG 026). The success rate (passing TASP) of those students was 88 percent.

In the spring 1991, 113 students were enrolled in reading courses; 67 were enrolled in the highest level of remediation. Of these 67 students, only 27 completed the coursework and took the TASP test during the spring 1991 semester. Of the 27 who took the TASP test, 19 passed for a success rate of 70 percent. Specifically, 21 of the students who completed RDG 035 took the TASP test and 14 passed (71 percent). Since during the spring semester students could have taken the test in February (after less than one month of instruction) or in April (after three months of instruction), more students were expected to pass the TASP reading test if they tested in April. This expectation was fulfilled. Of the 15 students who took the test in April, all but one passed (93 percent). Of the 15 students enrolled in RDG 026, 6 took the TASP test during the spring and 5 passed (83 percent).

Examining the impact of the one course designed to address both the reading and writing remediation needs of students, of the 68 students enrolled in ENG 038 during the spring 1991 semester, 22 took the TASP test during the spring. However, 2 of those who tested failed the course. Therefore, of the 20 who completed the course, 18 (90 percent) passed the reading part of TASP and 15 (75 percent) passed the writing part of TASP. Of the 2 students not passing the reading part, 1 tested in February and 1 tested in April. Of the 5 students not passing the writing part, 3 tested in February and 2 in April. In sum, of those testing in April, all but 1 passed the reading test and all but 2 passed the writing test. These data yield an adjusted success rate of

88 percent for the ENG 038 course in remediating reading and writing skill deficiencies.

In conclusion, of the students enrolled in the highest levels of remediation (RDG 035, 026 or ENG 038) in the spring 1991, 37 (78 percent) of the 47 students taking TASP passed the reading part. This 78 percent success rate contrasts with the 88 percent success rate for students enrolled in the highest level of remediation passing the TASP in the fall 1990. This lowered success rate, in part, may be explained by noting (a) the low number (percentage) of students participating in reading remediation taking the TASP test in April; possibly, if more students had taken the test, more would have passed and the overall success rate would have been higher; (b) the number of students who entered the reading program in the spring with lower reading skills than those who entered the program in the fall and thus would be expected to take longer to acquire reading proficiency; for example, the one student enrolled in RDG 035 who did not pass the reading test in April scored 215 (out of the 220 required for passing): When this student first entered the institution, he was reading at about the seventh grade level (with a Pre-TASP Test score of 42 percent, fall 1990); and, (c) the high number of students misplaced in exit-level remediation, this resulting from perhaps a too-flexible approach designed to convenience students even at the cost of denying them the opportunity to receive instruction at the appropriate level of difficulty. To illustrate, the one student enrolled in RDG 026 who did not pass the TASP test had scored 181 in the fall 1990; a TASP score between 200 and 219 is required for placement in RDG 026.

Interpreting the Data

Several tentative conclusions can be drawn from these data. First, students seem to benefit from early placement into remediation. Two of the students who had not passed the TASP test were yet on the Dean's List at the end of spring 1991. They had each been at the institution for two semesters and each had taken 6 hours of remediation (a 3-hour course each semester). On the other hand, 5 students were on academic probation; two had been enrolled for two semesters, but had not taken any remediation the first semester. [One had been enrolled for one semester and had enrolled in a 3-hour remedial course which he had failed; two had been enrolled for 4 semesters and had completed 15 hours of remediation.]

Second, students appear to benefit from appropriate placement in remediation. Remedial reading courses are designed to correspond to specific TASP scores as an indicator of the appropriate level of difficulty students are prepared to handle successfully. When students are placed into the appropriate courses (based on their TASP scores), they subsequently are successful in passing the TASP test.

Third, students who require extensive remediation (such as the 2 students who had completed 15 hours of remedial coursework) may be unable to make sufficient progress in remediation to undertake and succeed in a collegiate program of study. This inability may be the result of intellectual incapacities to perform successfully at the college-level suggesting that there is a performance "floor" below which remediation in college is ineffective, or this inability may be the result of motivational or other noncognitive factors hindering students' progress. The experience of the faculty working with these students suggests that in the 2 cases cited the

lack of success was due to the latter problem rather than the lack of intellectual aptitude. Nonetheless, the expected addition of an educational diagnostician to the staff of the institution should aid greatly in making these determinations and in helping faculty to work effectively with students.

Since the Learning Center is not responsible for the math and writing remedial programs, no data on student performance or success rates in these two areas is available for the Annual Report. Thus, the Learning Center is unable to compare its success with that of the other two areas providing TASP-relevant remediation; however, through comparisons with other reading programs in the state, the Learning Center has demonstrated a pattern of exceptional success in helping students remediate reading skill deficiencies.

Statistics on the Population Served, 1990-91

Demographics

The Learning Center served 2,403 students during the fall 1990 and spring 1991 semesters. Because some of the same students received services from the Learning Center in both the fall and spring semesters, the unduplicated count of students served is 1,502. This number is approximately 47 percent of the entire student body (based on spring 1991 registration totals) at South Plains College, Levelland campus.

By gender, slightly more males received services in the Learning Center compared to females: 788 (52 percent) of the students served were male, and 714 (48 percent) were female. This is not characteristic of the student body at the college in that the majority of students enrolled are female.

By ethnicity, the majority of students served, as characteristic of the student body, were Anglo (1,048 or 70 percent). Three-hundred and twenty-three Hispanics (21 percent) were served, and 109 African-Americans (7 percent) were served. Other ethnic groups made up 2 percent of the total served and included 3 Oriental students, 5 Native American students, and 14 international students. In regard to ethnicity, students served by the Learning Center were representative of the student body.

The majority of students served were technical-vocational majors: 756 (50 percent). Five-hundred and thirty-five students (36 percent) were academic-transfer majors, and 211 (14 percent) were undecided. Fifty-two (7 percent of the technical-vocational majors) were enrolled in nontraditional programs, that is, female students were enrolled in programs that had more than 75 percent male enrollment or male students enrolled in programs with more than 75 percent female enrollment.

TASP Status

In regard to the TASP status of students served by the Learning Center, 369 students (24 percent) were officially exempt from TASP either by (a) earning three semester hours of college credit prior to September 1, 1989, [344 students] or (b) enrolling in a certificate program requiring less than 9 general education hours of college credit [25 students]. However, of this exempt group, 10 did take TASP (as a requirement for entering teacher education programs), and 59 took the Pre-TASP Test (PTT) to provide placement information for courses at South Plains College. Five students had signed waivers at the time of registration stating that they had earned college credit prior to September 1, 1989, but without providing a transcript to that

effect, and 1 of those students took the PTT. Three students took the TASP test at another institution and passed, but the college did not receive their specific TASP scores.

Of those students not exempt from TASP receiving Learning Center services, 772 took the TASP test, and 466 (60 percent) passed all three parts of the test. Three-hundred and six students (40 percent) failed a portion of TASP, with 131 (43 percent) failing the reading portion, 186 (61 percent) failing the writing portion, and 205 (67 percent) failing the math portion of TASP. [NOTE: The percentages will total more than 100 since students could fail more than one portion of the test.]

Two-hundred and ninety-eight (20 percent of the total served) took the Pre-TASP Test for placement purposes and have not yet taken the official TASP test (as of July 1991). For 55 (4 percent) of the students served by the Learning Center, the institutional data base has no information on file regarding TASP status.

TASP Scores

Seven-hundred and eighty-one students took the TASP reading test. The vast majority of these students passed the test: 649 (83 percent) passed whereas 132 (17 percent) failed. Seven-hundred and seventy-four students took the writing test. Again, the majority passed: 586 (75 percent) passed whereas 188 (25 percent) failed. Finally, on the math test, of the 782 taking the test, 575 (73 percent) passed whereas 207 (23 percent) failed.

For comparison purposes, 356 students took the Pre-TASP Test (PTT) reading test; the majority did not pass. Only 164 students (46 percent) passed the test with a score of 70 percent or higher. Three hundred and

fifty-six students took the PTT writing test, and 154 (43 percent) passed. In math, 358 took the PTT and only 116 (32 percent) passed.

Although a number of factors may be involved in the lower passing rates for the PTT versus the TASP test, it is probable that better-prepared students are more likely to take the TASP test; that is, they are more likely to have been counseled in high school to take the TASP test and are simply more typical of college-bound youth. Also, they are more likely to seek out information about tests for college, including ACT, SAT, TASP, and CLEP. Underprepared students (or high-risk students) are much less likely to have received information from high school counselors or to seek out information on their own; their lack of academic skills often accompanies a lack of other cognitive and noncognitive skills and contributes to the difficulty they face in achieving a college education--as indicated by their low PTT scores. Whatever factors or conditions are cited to explain the discrepancy between TASP and PTT performance, the fact remains that students served by the Learning Center who took the PTT were much lower-skilled than those who took the TASP test. Simply taking the TASP test, then, may be construed as a factor in favor of the student.

Participation in TASP Remediation: Who Does the Learning Center Serve?

Of the students served by the Learning Center, the majority were not enrolled in remedial courses. Only a total of 645 students--unduplicated count (43 percent of the total served) were enrolled in remedial courses. Two-hundred and fifty-five students (17 percent of the total served) were enrolled in reading remediation, 418 (28 percent) were enrolled in writing remediation, and 565 (38 percent) were enrolled in math remediation. Seven

students were enrolled in developmental communications and 45 students enrolled in the College Success Course. [NOTE: These last two courses are not routinely recommended for TASP remediation.]

This means that the majority of students (57 percent) served by the Learning Center were not enrolled in course-based remediation provided in the Learning Center, but rather, were recipients of tutorial services or participants in Success Seminars or other workshop activities provided by the Learning Center. Thus, the Learning Center's primary function is not to provide specialized remedial services, but to provide comprehensive academic support services for the entire college population, especially those students who possess academic skills in reading, writing, and math sufficient for normal progress in college, but who require instructional services beyond those traditionally provided in the classroom. [See the Attachment for a list of the students who received services in the Learning Center; this attachment also gives by student name, the student's gender, ethnicity, TASP status, major code, and relevant TASP/PTT scores.]

Faculty/Staff Activities and Accomplishments

The Director of the Learning Center, Gail M. Platt, earned the doctor of philosophy degree from Texas Tech University in May 1991. Selected other professional activities in 1990-91 include the following:

-Advisor and Consultant, advisory committee for Brookhaven College (Dallas County Community College District) on a federally-funded project to develop reading materials for nursing students in community colleges;

-Presenter, three different community colleges (TSTI-Amarillo, Howard College in Big Spring, and Collin County Community College in Plano) for a federally-funded project awarded to Northeast Texas Community College for interfacing academic and technical skills for faculty in technical-vocational areas and academic subject areas. Also, served as team leader for the institutional team participating in these activities.

-Member and SPC Liaison, Texas Tech University Women's Studies Council Steering Committee for the Ninth Annual Conference for the Advancement of Women in Academia; served as panel moderator at the conference for a session on Women Making Connections;

-Speaker, TASP Panel at the National Institute of Higher Education's Annual Assessment Conference held in Washington, DC in the summer 1990 (invited by organization, one of three community college professionals speaking at the conference);

-Speaker, TASP Panel at the Texas Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers Conference in the fall 1990;

-Co-host, Regional TASP Conference at Texas Tech University (assisted TTU TASP Director in organizing the conference); also served as a session leader on TASP remediation;

-Presenter, the College Success Course at the Annual Conference on Academic Support Programs (CASP) in San Antonio;

-Sex Equity Liaison for the Carl Perkins Technical-Vocational activities;

-Participant (at own expense), Texas Junior College Teachers Association Conference in Dallas;

-Participant (at own expense), Statewide Conference for Women in Community and Junior Colleges in San Antonio;

-Participant, Vocational Equity Training Workshop sponsored by the Education Service Center Region XVII in Lubbock;

-Received an invitation to participate in the National Leadership Institute, sponsored by the American Association of Women in Community and Junior Colleges;

-Member, Texas Junior College Teachers Association; Texas Association of Developmental Educators; American Association of University Women; American Association of Women in Community and Junior Colleges; National Association of Women in Education.

Glenda Shamburger achieved the rank of Assistant Professor of Reading during the 1990-91 academic year. Selected professional activities include the following:

-Curriculum Developer, English 038;

-Curriculum Developer, special reading program for nursing students (Piloted the use of materials developed at Brookhaven College) resulting in a special section of Reading 035 to be offered in the fall 1991;

-Participant, CASP Conference in San Antonio;

-Participant, "Be Here Now" Conference sponsored by College Survival, Inc. in San Francisco;

-Participant, TASP Regional Conference held at Texas Tech University;

-Participant, Reading/Writing Conference held at Texas Tech University;

-Guest Lecturer, cognitive mapping in the College Success Course;

-Member, Texas Junior College Teachers Association; Texas Association of Developmental Educators.

Anne Solomon, a full-time temporary reading teacher in 1989-90, was employed as a full-time permanent reading teacher in 1990-91. Selected professional activities during 1990-91 include the following:

-Confirmed as Selected Presenter, 1991-92 Conference on Academic Support Programs to be held in Amarillo on the thematic use of film in developmental writing courses;

-Curriculum Developer, Reading 026;

-Researcher and Writer, Sex Equity grant proposal for Carl Perkins Technical and Vocational Act 1991-92;

-Participant, Matching Missions grant-writing workshop held at Texas Tech University;

-Participant, Vocational Equity workshop sponsored by the Education Service Center Region XVII;

-Participant, in CASP Conference in San Antonio;

-Participant, TASP Regional Conference at Texas Tech University;

-Participant, "Be Here Now" workshop in Dallas;

-Member, U. S. Fish and Wildlife International Leatherback Turtle Recovery Expedition, U. S. Virgin Islands;

-Counselor, Texas Tech Institute for the Gifted;

-Member, Texas Tech Women's Studies Council; Texas Junior College Teachers Association; Texas Association for Developmental Educators; American Association of Women in Community and Junior Colleges.

Maria Turrentine, formerly an instructor in the intensive English program at Texas Tech University, was employed as a full-time permanent reading instructor in the fall 1990. Selected professional acitivities include:

-Curriculum Developer, developmental communications curriculum to include activities for international students, such as city tours; presentations to students in elementary, middle, and high schools and to study clubs; field trips to see current films, the Texas Tech museum, and Carlsbad Caverns;

-Sponsor, 1991-92 International Students Club;

-Participant, CASP Conference in San Antonio;

-Participant and Session Moderator, TASP Regional Conference at Texas Tech University;

-Participant, "Be Here Now" workshop in Dallas;

-Guest Instructor, International College in the Cayman Islands, summer 1991;

-Member, Texas Junior College Teachers Association; Texas Association of Developmental Educators;

-completed 12 hours of graduate study in communications at Texas Tech University.

Deanna Hines, secretary in the Learning Center, completed her ninth year in the position. Her professional accomplishments include the development of a comprehensive computerized tracking system for accounting for student use of Learning Center services and the implementation of a computerized system for the Tutor Program (scheduling appointments and maintaining records on students served, services received, and hours worked by tutors). She also participated in a professional development seminar on communication skills for women and led an exercise on communication styles at the Learning Center end-of-year retreat.

Other Activities

As a department, the Learning Center was involved in a number of activities during the 1990-91 academic year. Below is a brief list of some of these activities.

-All professional staff of the Learning Center attended the 1990-91 Annual Conference on Academic Support Program in San Antonio, October 13-14, 1990.

-The Learning Center made arrangements for and promoted the appearance of a speaker for the spring 1991 in-service program for faculty, Dr. Matt Morrison of Abilene Christian University.

-The Learning Center served as the Sex Equity liaison for the utilization of Carl Perkins Technical and Vocational Funds, purchasing 3 sets of video programs for use in student and outreach programs and subscribing to the National Council for Research on Women.

-In an effort to build bridges between the Learning Center and other faculty, the Learning Center faculty hosted two luncheons with other instructional areas. The first lunch was at the Levelland Country Club and Kim Williamson, Chair of the Industrial Technology Department and his guest, instructor Mike Carrolland, discussed with the Learning Center faculty the reading needs of students in their department. The second lunch was at the Moon Palace restaurant with Mike Felker, newly-appointed chair of the English Department. Discussions centered on cooperation between the Learning Center and the English Department in remediating students' deficiencies with language skills and preparing students to succeed within an increasingly rigorous English Department curriculum.

-The Learning Center hosted visiting teams of professionals involved in TASP programs at two different institutions. Dr. Mary Broussard of Texas A & M led the first team, and Ms. Marilyn Lancaster, present President of TJCTA, from Western Texas College in Snyder led the second team.

-All professional staff in the Learning Center participated in the TASP Regional Conference, co-hosted by South Plains College and Texas Tech University.

-The Learning Center faculty and staff presented numerous College Success Seminars during both the fall 1990 and spring 1991 semester, specifically 8 seminars on 7 different topics were offered during the fall and 10 seminars on 9 different topics were offered during the spring. In addition, during the spring, the Learning Center Director arranged for 3 TASP Preparation Seminars, 4 Course Preparation Seminars, and 3 Career Preparation Seminars to be presented. Special presentations on college success were given to all students attending freshman orientation, 1990-91 and special topic study skills workshops were conducted for students in both the vocational nursing and associate degree nursing programs.

-Learning Center faculty spent, on average, 15 hours per week with students in private tutoring sessions.

-Learning Center faculty prepared reports to Faculty Advisors each semester, giving advisors information on their advisees' progress in remediation and recommendations for future coursework.

-Learning Center faculty prepared and sent letters of congratulations to all students participating in remedial courses taught in the Learning Center who subsequently passed the TASP test.

-Learning Center faculty invited instructional deans to visit classes during the spring semesters to observe remedial reading instruction and to promote administrators' understanding of remedial reading programs.

Evaluation

This section on evaluation contains qualitative versus quantitative information. The first section is a selection of professors' comments regarding the classes they taught in 1990-91. The second section is a selection of students' comments regarding the classes they took in the Learning Center in 1990-91.

Faculty Comments

Faculty were asked to comment on their successes, failures, and goals. Their (verbatim) remarks are listed below:

I need to return papers to students more quickly so that I can uncover students who are not getting their papers in. A shorter turn-around time might keep lax students on track.

All the students who passed the class made a 79+ average on the vocabulary component. This is quite an accomplishment for students reading on the 7th to 9th grade level who scored 35 on the first test or who expressed disbelief at the beginning of the semester that they could possibly learn 500 new or unfamiliar words.

The annotating-mapping-summarizing sequence lessons were very difficult but very valuable this semester. This very methodical approach to recitation of readings forced the students to "jump off the page" and paraphrase for the first time. . . . My students wrote more in their reading class this semester.

I am going to have students read more next semester. I am going to conduct more Think-Aloud lessons with students and model thinking processes during reading. I want to use the Discovery and Intention Journal System (a success course technique) to force students to recognize what they need to learn and what they do.

My general resolution is to continue to raise the level of work and response I ask of my students. My students this semester responded very well to my heightened expectations. . . . I believe I am the only teacher they [my students] had who discussed reading and its importance in her life.

I do dream of the day when we could offer a three-hour college credit class in Greek and Latin roots. Also, toward the end of the course (present two-hour remedial course), I intend to add increased emphasis on linguistics. This semester my students began to show heightened interest in the mechanics of language.

I plan to push TASP lab even more as a way for students to teach themselves how to meet such requirements independently and successfully.

The films I used in class had a positive result. Absenteeism was decreased. Students seemed more willing and involved in turning in written assignments. My goal is to increase the integration of printed matter with the films. . . . Generating ideas and the energy it takes to write about them seems to me of primary importance . . . [we] are going to evaluate students' writing samples the first day so we can re-direct students who are misplaced.

I taught a lesson in 035 from my planned 133. The results were great. This is the first time . . . I have had an entire class thank me for a lesson. They were excited--and it was a lesson on reading poetry.

The things I did with my classes that were good were: reading a book in class, using Tactics for Learning, playing Bingo with prefixes, suffixes, and root words, and giving homework passes. I required my classes to read three books and to do an oral and a written book report. If they had less than two absences, they did not have to take the final. I also had students teach and gave students a computer printout with their grades.

I want to work at least one or two days a week on [vocabulary], and I would like to use more real-life situations in reading classes.

Student Comments

As a program with a student-centered philosophy, the most valued evaluation is that received from students. Following are students' comments from standardized teacher evaluations administered in the fall 1990.(1) All

comments from a class chosen at random are given; no attempt was made to select only positive remarks. [Grammatical and spelling errors were corrected.]

She is very knowledgeable. / I just let her know that she is doing a good job, being a teacher. / She is there to help when we need it! / She always smiles and is a very exciting teacher. / She is ready to teach class. / Interesting subjects and good guest speakers. Fun assignments. / She communicates well with us. This class has helped me a lot with my other classes. / She helps when anyone is in need of help. She is very understanding. / We fell behind schedule one time but she caught us back up.

She is a very good teacher. / Always patient. / I think she is a very good instructor. She is always ready for class. / She is a wonderful teacher. / She has a good attitude and knows her material. She is inspiring and helps motivate us. She helps us to understand and helps us out with problems. She knows what she is doing. / She explains everything very well. / She is helpful, understanding, hardworking, and knowledgeable of her subject. / She's just a great teacher and is always willing to help those who need it. / She takes time to talk to each of her students about his/her weak points. She is determined for us to pass the TASP test. She also promised me help on study skills. / She has no weak points, but is an overall good instructor.

She is willing to help us in any way she can. / She explains what she is talking about very well. If we have questions, she helps us out. / She knows what she is doing and takes time to explain things.

She has helped us a bunch and she is easy to understand. / She usually helps with problem areas and tries to help with other class problems if she can. / She is a terrific teacher and I have learned a lot in this class. / She makes the class interesting and fun. / Her strongest point is that she is able to motivate the students. / She is knowledgeable and makes students feel comfortable. / She is always willing to help anyone when we need it. She knows everyone in the class individually and knows each of our weak points and strong points.

(Note 1) Slash marks (/) separate comments from different students.

Conclusions

Overall, the faculty and staff in the Learning Center rate the 1990-91 academic year as a good one. Enrollment was increased in the spring 1991 over spring 1990; increased enthusiasm and more positive attitudes among students were observed; and, better-prepared (higher-skilled) students were taking developmental courses in reading and study skills. Many students appeared to be intrinsically motivated to do well in their developmental courses and to acquire college-level skills; they wanted to learn more than just the minimal skills required to pass the TASP test.

Reading faculty reported that students who were initially resistant to taking a reading class often changed their minds once they realized what was going to happen in the course. One student told a professor, "I just feel embarrassed to be taking this course." The professor asked, "Should I be embarrassed to be teaching this course?" After some discussion, the student showed greater understanding of why reading is a fundamental skill, why college reading is more than just simple decoding, and seemed to accept the importance of taking a reading course. Another faculty member reported that students, after completing an exit-level course and passing the TASP test, often would ask if there were other courses available that would continue the instruction in reading they had received.

After attending the TASP Regional Conference held at Texas Tech University in the early summer 1991, the faculty of the Learning Center commented that they felt much more comfortable with what they were doing in regard to TASP remediation than many faculty from other institutions indicated. They attributed their comfort level to (a) having received

adequate and appropriate information about TASP policies and thus being very knowledgeable about the program, (b) having chances to interact with other developmental faculty on campus about TASP issues and concerns, and (c) having at their disposal a full and varied curriculum designed to meet the diverse needs of students who have difficulty passing the TASP reading test.

Goals for 1991-92

At the Learning Center end-of-year retreat, the faculty and staff developed the following organizational goals for 1991-92:

-Establish a computerized learning center (with CCC and CEI software) in order to meet legitimately the needs of truly academically disadvantaged students and students with special needs;

-Provide an in-service professional development program to increase reading awareness among faculty (emphasizing the skills involved in college-level reading and students' attitudes about reading that can be influenced by instructors' behaviors);

-Continue precedent established of inviting departmental chairs and faculty representatives to lunch to discuss connections between the Learning Center and instructional departments;

-Offer assistance in evaluating writing samples from Pre-TASP Test to provide more accurate placement guidelines for students who need writing remediation;

-Use the alternate form of the Pre-TASP Test (reading section) as an exit test for RDG 030 and 034 and as a preliminary indicator for RDG 035 and 026;

-Convert the independent-study lab into a TASP Lab, stressing materials and aids to help students study for and pass the TASP test;

-Offer professional development workshops for Learning Center faculty (with the possibility of inviting other interested faculty) on the following topics:

-Meeting the needs of handicapped students (Coordinator of Services for Special Populations, TBH);
-Advisement (Claudine Oliver, presenter);
-Meeting the needs of learning disabled students (Diagnostician, TBH);
-SAC Resources (all SAC personnel).

Conclusions

In this 1990-91 Annual Report, changes in the Learning Center since the last published Annual Report (1987-88) were described. These changes included the implementation of a statewide program for placement testing, advisement, remediation, and evaluation (the Texas Academic Skills Program, TASP), the realignment of remedial English and math within their own departmental boundaries with the responsibility for reading remediation, study skills, and developmental communications residing within the Learning Center's domain, and a change in the Learning Center's reporting mechanism. This report also contains a description of the Learning Center's course-based instructional component and the statistics describing the population served by the Learning Center in 1990-91. Following the statistics section, a description of the activities of the Learning Center professionals and miscellaneous activities was presented. Finally, a brief evaluation of Learning Center 1990-91 activities and a list of goals for 1991-92 were given. This summary will recount some of the highlights of selected sections and provide commentary on some of the more significant issues associated with those sections. In closing, speculation on trends for the future will be offered.

Changes: Are They Working?

TASP Issues. Because of its responsibility to provide remedial reading instruction for the students of the college and its historic role in providing most of the remedial activities for the institution (prior to fall 1989), the implementation of TASP was a charge accepted by the professional staff of the Learning Center. Philosophically, the staff agreed that academic standards were eroding and that increasing numbers of students were entering the institution lacking basic skills in reading, writing, and math. The staff of the Learning Center had been involved in the placement testing of all entering students prior to the implementation of TASP and had seen firsthand the effects of an open-admissions policy and the reluctance of faculty advisors to recommend remediation (even when clearly indicated by placement tests) when their own course enrollments (and thus their own jobs) were dependent on advising students to take college-level courses--whether or not students were prepared for such courses.

This does not mean that the Learning Center staff did not have reservations about the use of the TASP test (even though the Director of the Learning Center served on a statewide committee for the implementation of the TASP). For example, the use of a single measure to indicate students' readiness for undertaking collegiate study seems questionable; other factors should be considered. However, determining what factors should be included and how to weigh those factors are problematic issues: High school grades vary widely and sometimes fail to reflect students' true academic preparation; most students entering the institution have not taken college entrance tests and thus those measures are not available. In fact, most students entering the institution supply minimal information and often TASP (or PTT) scores are

the only information available upon which to base course recommendations. Along similar lines, a problem with using the PTT for course placement is that locally only the multiple-choice part of the writing test has been used and students have not been asked to provide a writing sample, the best indicator of a student's readiness to undertake college English.

Second, the staff questions the level of difficulty of the TASP reading test. Very high passing rates on the TASP (and PTT) reading test suggests that it lacks the rigor of the "Nelson-Denny Reading Test." In fact, the Director of the Learning Center served as chair of the reading committee for TASP (1989-90) and was under the impression that the test would increase in difficulty as the program got underway. Questioning the level of difficulty rests on more than the simple comparison of TASP (and PTT) with the "Nelson-Denny Reading Test" and the professional opinion of the reading faculty that the test is too easy. There are still large numbers of students referred to the Learning Center because they are not performing well in courses; upon inquiry, the majority of these students report that they do not read their textbooks because they find the reading difficult. An opinion survey also indicated that students are reluctant to read texts. Therefore, it appears that many students who pass the TASP reading test lack sufficient reading proficiency to comprehend college-level texts.

The Learning Center staff also have observed other difficulties in the successful implementation of TASP beyond the issues associated with the test instrument itself. The TASP is a complicated and far-reaching program, and many faculty (especially faculty advisors) do not fully understand the program and its policies. Therefore, misinformation is rampant. Students resent

being told one thing by their faculty advisors and something else by an administrative office (whichever office that happens to be).

The lack of understanding of TASP is not only due to the breadth of the program and its numerous components, but also due to faculty's own perceptions that the TASP is a threat to course enrollments in their instructional areas. If too many students are required to participate in remediation, the number of students in their own programs might be seriously reduced. Hence, instead of desiring to see that students successfully participate in remediation, some faculty merely seek to help students evade remediation.

This philosophical approach is not only characteristic of faculty. Some administrators also have interpreted the TASP as unwelcomed state interference in institutional policy and a loss of local control. Complying with the TASP has been inconvenient (and costly) in that more sophisticated record-keeping and tracking have been required, course guidelines and standards have had to be examined, and local policies have had to be developed to deal with specific issues of TASP implementation. The workload in several departments or programs has increased as a result of TASP; for example, the Dean of Students Office has been made responsible for calling in those students who fail to attend required remedial classes and for providing them with counseling and/or withdrawal from the institution. The workload in the Counseling Center, the Learning Center, the Registrar's Office, and the Computer Center also has increased.

The point of concern here is that the successful implementation of new programs is largely dependent upon administrative support, expecially the support of top-level administration. With any new program, when administrators not only fail to support the program, but are openly

antagonistic, faculty can be expected to follow suit. Consequently, there is a philosophical barrier to the implementation and success of the program as well as numerous practical barriers.

Moreover, the Learning Center professional staff have been concerned about administrator/faculty attitudes towards remediation, especially as reflected by local policy which (a) requires that students remediate in only one area at a time, even when students have failed all three parts of the TASP (or PTT), (b) generously allows for noncourse-based remediation, even though the instructional departments have produced data indicating that noncourse-based remediation is ineffective for most students, and (c) fails to follow through with consequences when students fail to comply with mandatory remediation. For an example of this first concern, students who score low in all three basic skill areas (reading, writing, and math) must begin remediation at the lowest level in each skill area; this usually amounts to a total of 27 semester-credit-hours of remediation required by the student. By taking one three-hour course each semester, the student will need nine semesters to complete the program of remediation; few (if any) students lacking basic skills will be able to persist in college for nine semesters. Moreover, as often is the case, the student takes an entry-level reading course, the next semester a math course, the next semester an English course, and so forth; by the time the student takes a mid-level course, it has been two semesters since he or she took the entry-level course and, often, the student has not retained important information taught in the entry-level course. This practice, indeed, traps the student and delays--if not prevents--his or her ever acquiring the necessary skills to do college-level work.

To explain the second concern, faculty responsible for reading, writing, and math instruction have examined the success of non-course-based remediation and found it to be ineffective for the majority of students. In fact, it is usually the nontraditional student (older and very highly self-motivated) who already has completed entry-level remediation (and sometimes mid-level remediation) who is able to continue a remedial program on an independent-study or guided study (non-course-based) basis. For example, in the summer of 1990, several individuals were referred to the Learning Center to participate in non-course-based reading programs; only one student complied. Subsequently, he passed all parts of the TASP (even though he was a GED student who had completed only four years of formal education). The majority of students served by South Plains College, Levelland, especially recent high school graduates, do not have the motivation or self-discipline to succeed in non-course-based programs of remediation.

To illustrate the third concern, local policy (as required by state policy) states that when students fail to participate in required remediation, they are subject to institutional withdrawal; but, in more than one case, students have stopped participating in remediation without being withdrawn from the institution. Unfortunately, it seems that the application of policy has been lax for some students and rigorous for others. Students naturally are confused and belligerent when rules and regulations are unevenly applied. While the Learning Center staff would allow that even under the best of circumstances, clerical errors and management mistakes will occur through oversight, these incidences have involved individuals and situations brought to the attention of those in charge. These recurring episodes have had a

somewhat demoralizing effect on the faculty charged with the responsibility of providing remedial instruction.

For the most part, the TASP, although not a program without flaws, is a necessary counterbalance to the open-admissions practices of public colleges and universities in Texas. Most institutions are reporting that the implementation of the TASP is going along smoothly even as specific problems and issues are examined. While the TASP may be revised in the future, it is unlikely that its need will be eradicated any time soon. Performance of high school students on the standardized exit test used in Texas (the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, TAAS) indicates that increasing numbers of high school students are having difficulty mastering the basic academic skills.

Departmental Shifting. Although it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the realignment of English and math within their departmental structures, preliminary analysis suggests that the move has been beneficial. One benefit already evidenced has been the creation of the Math Lab.

Organizational Structure. When the administrative reporting mechanism of the Learning Center was changed from the Vice-President of Academic Affairs to the Dean of Students, numerous reasons against the move were presented to the President of the institution, the primary reason being that the Learning Center was an academic unit, employing faculty as professional staff, and responsible for instructional activities. The Learning Center, regardless of reporting channels or organizational structure, is an instructional unit.

Various subcommittees working on the implementation of TASP and examining formats for the delivery of remedial instruction explicitly recommended that academic support service personnel report directly to the chief academic officer for the institution (TASP Implementation Committee Recommendations,

1988-89). Moreover, the move was inconsistent with systemwide organization and structure in that on the Lubbock campus of the institution, academic support services do report to the Dean of Instruction. However, once the appeals were denied and the decision was made final, it was accepted by the Learning Center professionals. Under present circumstances and due to the specific personnel involved, the change in reporting channels--although not without difficulties--has been positive. Administrative support, already noted as a crucial element, has been much improved under the Dean of Students.

Course-Based Remediation: Does It Work?

Based on the Learning Center's experiences in 1989-91 with TASP-relevant reading remediation, remediation does work. If students are correctly placed in appropriate course-based remediation, 88 percent (or more) of those in higher-level remedial courses can be successful (or can pass the TASP reading test). The problem, as previously identified, is attaining correct placement.

For those students who have low TASP (or PTT scores) and/or who enter the institution reading below the seventh grade-level, the outlook is not as bright. In most cases, these students (about 9 percent of those requiring remediation) will need three semesters of reading remediation before their deficiencies fully can be addressed. When students enter the institution already thinking that a semester of reading remediation "doesn't count" (for college-level credit) and is delaying them in pursuing their goals, is it reasonable to think that they can sustain remediation for three semesters? This problem is further compounded by the concern already voiced that these students tend to be weak in all three academic areas.

Furthermore, there is usually some dramatic reason for a student to enter college at such a low level. Often, the student has serious learning disabilities, low general intelligence, or a pervasive history of academic failure, and thus, very low self-esteem. Many times noncognitive and affective factors seem to play as important a role in the student's success (or lack of success) as his or her cognitive skills. In most cases, reading skills can be improved through remediation although it is doubtful that at an entry-level below seventh grade, the student's skills can be increased to the college-level.

Troubling also is the fact that some students can (and do) succeed in their college-level courses even when they lack college-level reading skills. The barrier for these students then is passing the TASP reading test (without which they cannot graduate) and the TASP requirement for continuous remediation until they pass all parts of the test. The barrier should not be a test, but should be coursework at an appropriate level of difficulty with reading requirements accurately reflecting "college-level" study. An implicit goal of the TASP is to raise the standards of the college-level curriculum, but with textbooks increasingly "dummied down" and instructors more reliant on testing over lecture (versus textbook) material, the effect of increasing academic standards may be a long time coming.

Nonetheless, for the majority of students (91 percent), reading remediation does work, especially for the 52 percent who need the highest-level (or exit-level) remediation. In many cases, these students are readers who have not valued reading or who have not found it necessary to read much or often in order to obtain their school goals. When they learn cognitive and metacognitive strategies to increase their reading vocabulary,

comprehension, analytical and reasoning skills, and study skills, they are excited about reading.

Population: Who Was Served?

The Learning Center, as an academic-support activity, is not only involved in remedial instruction, but the majority of students served by the Learning Center are those not requiring remediation, but seeking specialized assistance to support their success in college. In 1990-91, the Learning Center served 1,502 students (unduplicated count); only 646 students were required (on the basis of their TASP or Pre-TASP Test (PTT) scores to participate in remediation.

Demographic characteristics reveal that the Learning Center serves all students at the institution. The majority of students served were Anglo, followed by Hispanics, then African-Americans, representative of the student body. More males than females received services, contrary to institutional enrollment. Also, more technical-vocational majors were recipients of services, contrary to the institutional enrollment pattern.

Looking Ahead: What Does the Future Hold?

The function of the Learning Center is at least two-fold: First, the Learning Center provides academic support services to all students enrolled at the college; second, the Learning Center provides remedial instruction in reading (and study skills and developmental communications). In consideration of this two-fold function, some observations pertinent to each role are offered.

Academic Support Services. Colleges and universities have provided academic support services to students since open-admissions policies were adopted by public institutions in the early 1960's. Maxwell (1979) commenting on the 1960s through 1980 in higher education noted that colleges, aided by government funding and pressured by politics, opened their doors to low-income groups, especially women and minorities that were underrepresented in academia; open-admissions policies were instituted by most two-year and many four-year colleges. Throughout the country, colleges created learning centers and tutorial programs--at first to aid minority students, but later to serve other students as well.

The TASP, as state-mandated policy for higher education in Texas, also lends credence to the importance of academic support programs for students. In fact, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has asked the 1990-91 legislature to earmark special funding for noncourse-based remediation for TASP, presumably with the funding going to tutorial services, computer-aided-instruction, workshops, seminars, and so forth.

The Learning Center remains committed to its original mission. As set forth in the 1987-88 Annual Report, the Learning Center staff believe that individuals, regardless of their present proficiency, can continue to develop higher-level and more efficient skills, and is dedicated to offering services to all students who wish to further develop their skills, including those students with better-than-average abilities enrolled in advanced courses.

Remediation. The need for remediation seems to be a fact of life in American higher education. Numerous studies have revealed that between one-third and one-half of all students entering higher education have serious skill deficiencies in reading, writing, and/or math and require remedial

assistance (Doyle & Kearns, 1991; Skinner & Carter, 1987). For example, Samuelson (1991B) suggests that although in 1990, 81 percent of college freshmen had a B average or better in high school, only 5 percent of high school seniors were ready for college math.

Thus, in order to give students a chance of success in college, especially in the growing number of technical fields requiring math and science coursework, remediation is essential. A recent editorial in a local newspaper concluded that remediation in college is a "textbook case of the end justifying the means" (Lubbock Avalanche Journal, June 23, 1991).

However, the need for extensive remediation in college is not without its critics. Some have called for stiffer high school prerequisites required for college admission (Samuelson, 1991A), college admission standards denying entrance to those students who do not meet the college-level criteria, and for required remediation to be exempt from federal and state student financial aid funding (Finn, 1991). To explain, Finn argues, "If enough people find themselves spending extra semesters and more of their own money on what amounts to a belated secondary education--one that would be completely free if completed while in school--the word would quickly reach schools, parents, and young siblings."

As Texas lawmakers consider how to fund higher education and institutions face inevitable budget cuts, it is only a matter of time before the question of remediation in college is addressed again. The 1987 Texas legislature approved the need for remediation in college in acknowledgement of the importance of access to higher education for groups that had been previously denied educational opportunities.

Open-admissions practices dictate a need for remediation. But, will the legislature question the wisdom of open-admissions practices? Will open-admissions with access to virtually all individuals--regardless of ability to benefit--become too expensive for the taxpayers of Texas? This issue will definitely impact on the future of the Learning Center and its role in college remediation.

Concluding Remarks: What Else?

In the last Annual Report, several issues were raised as affecting the future of education and the Learning Center. Many of these issues are still relevant today.

Back then, the first issue raised was the whole notion of critical literacy. Richardson, Fisk, and Okun (1983) had defined critical literacy as "the hallmark of collegiate study. . . . [requiring] clear articulation of educational goals and the development of higher levels of thinking. It requires independence and self-direction" (p. xii). Although the public seems to have tired of hearing about problems with public education, the problems have yet to be effectively addressed. The TASP may address basic academic skills, but there is too little attention given to the need to evaluate present academic standards and teaching methodologies that are teacher-centered rather than student-centered and which focus on students performing a minimum of perfunctory tasks (such as multiple-choice tests) instead of requiring analysis, synthesis, application, and evaluation (through more elaborate and creative assessment). Critical literacy is not yet a standard for community college education.

Other concerns of the Learning Center in earlier years were the increasing number of "special students" enrolling at the institution and requiring extensive and specialized assistance and the increasing number of requests from nonstudents. These concerns are just now being addressed by the institution with the creation of positions for a Special Populations Coordinator and an Educational Diagnostician. Individuals assuming these positions will play an important and necessary role at the institution as they help coordinate campus and community resources to meet the needs of special students and provide assessment of those specific needs.

Finally, an issue which affected the future of the Learning Center in 1987-88 and continues to be a critical issue today is that of program funding. Although the legislature (in 1987) approved the funding of the TASP--albeit at a much lower level than that recommended by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board--and locally $174,741 was awarded to the institution in 1989-90 and 1990-91 as "upstart" funds for new programs necessitated by TASP, no significant increase was seen in departmental budgets for reading, writing, or math remediation or for placement and advisement activities on the Levelland campus.

We in higher education now are being asked to evaluate present operations and consider important funding changes (such as the proposal to increase tuition significantly and to contribute from local funds and tuition a larger percentage of the total budget for community colleges, Texas Performance Review). It is reasonable that we trim any excess from our institutional budgets and stand ready for closer scrutiny from local, state, and federal entities. However, we cannot afford to cut expenditures for basic academic skills which assure quality in education. The long-term costs of compromising

or further eroding academic standards are too high and society can ill-afford the price of offering courses to students who are unequipped with the skills they need in order to profit from collegiate instruction. To do so is simply bad business and contrary to both economic and ethical principles.

The only logical alternative is to close the "open door." Community colleges, especially, have taken pride--and rightfully so--in the tradition of the "open door" because it is the portal through which members of minority groups, females, older adults, laborers in the workforce, and others who normally would have been denied access to higher education, have been able to attain what previously would have been impossible. The "open door" has allowed dreams to become reality.

The seriousness of the present situation is that without remediation and academic support services to help those who often also have been denied quality public school educations is to turn those dreams into nightmares with the open door becoming nothing more than a revolving door or, worse, students completing courses and even degrees and still lacking the skills to obtain suitable employment or to contribute to society. Even politicians and bureacrats claim sensitivity to this issue.

In the end, education must be part of the solution. And, an important part of that education is telling the story of Learning Centers. For the 1,502 students served last year, this Learning Center made a difference. Without the help of the Learning Center, almost half of the campus population would have had a harder time, academically, last year at South Plains College, Levelland. The majority of these students (1,011 or 67 percent) obtained sufficient grade point averages to continue their studies at the college,

earning a 2.0 or higher grade point average. Investing in the Learning Center is good business, educationally and economically.

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ATTACHMENT
OVERVIEW

FILE: LEARNING CENTER

DISK: 90-FS1, 90-FS2 **RECORDS** 1502

TERM: Fall'90-Spring'91

SEX: M 788 F 714

ETHNICITY:

Caucasian (1):	1048
Black (2):	109
Hispanic (3):	323
Oriental (4):	3
American Indian (5):	5
Foreign (6):	14
Other (7):	0

TASP STATUS:

191	(1)	Tasp Exempt: Grandfather	*6 took TASP/31 took Pre-TASP
25	(2)	Exempt: Certificate	7 took Pre-TASP
5	(3)	Temporary Waiver	1 took Pre-TASP
306	(4)	Failed Portion of Tasp: 131 RDG 186 WRT 205 MTH	
466	(5)	Tasp passed	
153	(6)	Exempt: Transfer Hours	*4 took TASP/21 took Pre-TASP
3	(7)	Took Tasp: No scores	
298	(8)	Took Pre-Tasp	
55	(0)	NO DATA	

TASP SCORES: (782)
Reading: (781)
→ 219: 132
220 → : 649

Writing: (774)
→ 219: 188
220 → : 586

Math: (782)
→ 219: 207
220 → : 575

PRE-TASP SCORES: (358)
Reading: (356)
→ 69: 192
70 → : 164

Writing: (356)
→ 69: 202
70 → : 154

Math: (358)
→ 69: 242
70 → : 116

CUMULATIVE GPA: (1349)[1] (590) COL (770)[2] ALT

4.0	39	(21)	(89)
3.0-3.99	390	(227)	(196)
2.0-2.99	582	(233)	(197)
1.0-1.99	247	(78)	(115)
→0.99	86	(31)	(107)
W (82)			PR(65)
NT (15)			
N-S (61)			

GPA: MEAN (2.04) (2.22) (2.06)

REMEDIATION: (646)

Reading: 255
Writing: 316 + (102)*
Math: 565

(D C: 7) *Eng038
(CSC: 45)

TVO: 756

ACAD: 535

UNDECIDED: 211

EQUITY ANALYSIS: (52)
M 34
F 18

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[1]Cumulative GPA was based on all classes attempted by whole group, COL signifies students in the whole group who took ONLY college-level courses. Difference in whole group numbers and COL numbers are those students in remediation who also attempted college-level courses. W=withdrawn in first semester of college; NT=students in remediation only; N-S=students who were in preparation to enter nursing or cosmetology programs, but who were not enrolled at time of assistance.

[2]PR's were not computed in Alternative GPA mean.

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